

GREEN. (S. A.)

# THE POPULATION OF GROTON

AT DIFFERENT TIMES,

WITH SOME NOTES ON THE PROVINCIAL  
CENSUS OF 1765.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, ON  
MAY 10, 1888, AND NOW REPRINTED FROM THE PROCEEDINGS.

By SAMUEL ABBOTT GREEN, M.D.



CAMBRIDGE:  
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THE town of Groton was formerly a much more important place relatively, both in size and influence, than it is at the present time. According to the census of 1790, it was then the second town in Middlesex County, Cambridge alone having a larger population. At that time Groton had 322 families, numbering 1,840 persons; and Cambridge, 355 families, numbering 2,115 persons. Charlestown had a population of 1,583; and Newton, 1,360. Reading, with 341 families (19 more than Groton), numbered 1,802 persons (38 less than Groton). Woburn then had a population of 1,727; Framingham, 1,598; Marlborough, 1,554; and Waltham, 882. Pepperell contained 1,132 inhabitants; Shirley, 677; Westford, 1,229; and Littleton, 854.

There were at that time in Middlesex County 41 towns, which number has since been increased to 48 towns and 6 cities; and in the mean while Brighton and Charlestown have been merged in the municipality of Boston, and thus have lost their separate existence. Major Aaron Brown, of Groton, and General Henry Woods, of Pepperell, were the marshals who took the census of the county, with the exception of that small portion lying on the further side of the Merrimack River.

The town of Groton was incorporated on May 25, 1655; and its territory originally comprised 64 square miles, which



was considerably increased by the liberal measurement so common in those days. In a report made on May 23, 1661, by a committee consisting of Mr. Thomas Danforth, a noted surveyor of early times, Captain Edward Johnson, the historian, and Ephraim Child, it is said that this territory would afford comfortable accommodations for 60 families at least, that might subsist by husbandry. When it is stated that there are now living, within the original limits of Groton Plantation, more than 9,000 inhabitants, it will be seen how vain are human predictions and calculations.

A comparison of the population of the town at different periods is somewhat interesting to those familiar with its history. John Tinker, in a petition to the General Court, dated October, 1659, four years after the incorporation of the town, says that the Plantation "Continueth vnpeopled." The report of the committee, — of which Thomas Danforth was chairman, — dated May 23, 1661, and already quoted, states that there were four or five families "planted" at that time. In March, 1676, when the town was burned by the Indians, it was estimated by the Rev. William Hubbard, in his Narrative, that there were then 60 families in the place. Another writer of that period puts the number of dwellings destroyed at 66, and says that only 6 houses were left standing. From these estimates it would appear that the population of the town at the time of its destruction was between 300 and 350 inhabitants. From March, 1676, until the early spring of 1678, the settlement was abandoned and entirely deserted. In March, 1680, there were 40 families in the town, as appears by some statistical returns printed in "The New-England Historical and Genealogical Register" (V. 173) for April, 1851. In March, 1707-8, there were 67 polls ("Collections of the American Statistical Association," p. 146), which would indicate a population of about 300 persons. At the beginning of the year 1755 there were 14 negro slaves in town — seven men and seven women — who were sixteen years old or upwards.

On June 2, 1763, Governor Francis Bernard sent a message

to the General Court, expressing his wish that a census of the Province might be taken; but that body paid no heed to the suggestion. On January 19, 1764, he renewed the proposition, and apparently with better success; for the Legislature, on February 2, adopted an order carrying out his wishes. The popular heart, however, was not in the work, and no interest was taken in the measure. The people were suspicious of the rulers in England, and jealous of all political interference; and it is but natural that the census proceeded slowly. On March 5, 1765, an Act was passed by the General Court to carry into effect an order which had previously been passed for numbering the people within the Province. This action shows that the Governor's pet scheme was not receiving a warm support.

With these drawbacks, and under such conditions, the first census of the houses, families, and number of people in the Province of Massachusetts Bay ever taken was finished in the year 1765. Singularly enough, there are now no returns of this enumeration among the Provincial or State archives, where they were undoubtedly placed. How or when they disappeared is a matter of conjecture; but probably they were lost amid the confusion that naturally prevailed during the Revolutionary period. Fortunately a copy of this census was found by the late Judge Samuel Dana, of Groton, among some papers of a deceased friend, which had then lately come into his possession; and by him sent to the "Columbian Centinel" newspaper, where it was printed for the first time in the issue of August 17, 1822, more than half a century after the enumeration was made. From this source is derived all the information concerning the figures of the census of 1765; and the printed copy, in the absence of any other, is an authority second in importance only to the original manuscript returns. At that time the town of Groton had 1,408 inhabitants.

In his letter to the editor of the Centinel, Judge Dana suggests that the copy — presumably the original document —



should be sent, after it was printed, to the Antiquarian Society for preservation in its library. If he meant by this expression the American Antiquarian Society at Worcester, it appears not to have been done. Within a few weeks a careful search for it has been made by the librarian, but without success; and no record of the missing document is found among the accessions of that period. After it had been used as "copy" by the printers, it probably was thrown away.

In the early days of library management, loose manuscripts and other papers were not guarded with that care which they now receive, and consequently were more liable to loss. I mention this fact, because these missing census returns were once probably in the possession of the Historical Society. Among some gifts made to this library by the Rev. Dr. James Freeman, on April 9, 1791, is a "List of Inhabitants in the Province of Massachusetts Bay, in 1764 and 1765" (Proceedings, vol. i. p. 8), which does not appear in the Society's Catalogue published in the year 1811; nor is there now any clew to it. The Catalogue of 1796 does not give the separate manuscripts. Perhaps this list was taken out from the library by a member at some time between the years 1791 and 1811, and never returned. Subsequently it may have drifted into Judge Dana's hands, and thus found its way to the public through the columns of the Centinel.

Akin to this subject, there is in the Society's library a memorandum-book of forty-five pages, which contains some interesting facts connected directly or indirectly with the population of the Commonwealth during the Revolutionary period. Mr. Felt, a former librarian, evidently used it in preparing an article on the population of Massachusetts, which is published in the first volume of the "Collections of the American Statistical Association" (Boston, 1847). In his paper Mr. Felt gives nearly all the statistics found in the book, and speaks of it as "a manuscript of credible authority" (p. 157), though without mentioning it more specifically.



The number of white persons within the State in the year 1776, and the number of polls in 1778 and 1781, as well as other statistical items, are also given, though it is not known by whom the record was made. According to this authority the population of Groton in the year 1776 was 1,639; the number of ratable polls in 1778 was 362, and the number in 1781 was 395.

In compliance with a resolution of Congress, an Act was passed by the General Court of Massachusetts on July 2, 1784, requiring the assessors of towns to make certain returns, from which it appears that there were at that time 418 polls in Groton. This was the largest number returned by any town in the county, with the single exception of Cambridge, which had 457 polls; and after Groton came Reading with 399 polls, and Woburn with 395, followed closely by Framingham with 389.

At the several decennial dates of the United States census the population of Groton has been as follows: in the year 1790, 1,840; 1800, 1,802; 1810, 1,886; 1820, 1,897; 1830, 1,925; 1840, 2,139; 1850, 2,515; 1860, 3,193; 1870, 3,584; and 1880, 1,862. The town of Ayer was incorporated on February 14, 1871, and made up almost entirely from the territory of Groton, which accounts for the great diminution in the population between the last two decennial periods, as given above. The new town started on its corporate existence with a population nearly equal to that of the parent town, and, with all the vigor of youth, soon surpassed it in size.

The population of Groton, as taken by the State in the quinquennial years, has been as follows: in the year 1855, 2,745; 1865, 3,176; 1875, 1,908; and 1885, 1,987. By all the enumerations, National or State, made during the present century, it will be seen that there has been a steady increase in the population of the town, with the exception of the period between the years 1860 and 1865, when there was a slight decrease of 17 inhabitants; and of the period between

1875 and 1880, when there was a falling off of 46 inhabitants. The loss in the first instance was due, of course, to the disturbing effects of the Civil War.

The population of Ayer in the year 1885 was 2,190 ; and if that village had not been separately incorporated, the population of Groton would now be considerably more than 4,000 inhabitants. According to the last State census there were 32 towns or cities in Middlesex County larger than Groton, and 21 towns smaller.

The original Groton Plantation, as granted by the General Court on May 25, 1655, has furnished the entire territory of Ayer ; the whole of Pepperell, with the exception of a narrow strip lying along its northern boundary, which once belonged to the West Parish of Dunstable (Hollis) ; the whole of Shirley, with the exception of a small portion formerly known as " Stow Leg ; " one half of Dunstable ; and has contributed more or less to form five other towns,—namely, Harvard, Littleton, and Westford (including a part of Forge Village), in Massachusetts, besides Nashua and Hollis, in New Hampshire. The total population of this territory is now between 9,000 and 10,000 inhabitants.

#### SUMMARY.

##### *Population of Groton at different Times.*

Town incorporated on May 25, 1655 ; in October, 1659, " vn-peopled ; " in May, 1661, four or five families ; in March, 1676, about 300 inhabitants ; in March, 1680, forty families ; in March, 1708, 67 polls ; in March, 1765, 1,408 inhabitants ; in 1776, 1,639 inhabitants ; in 1778, 362 polls ; in 1781, 395 polls ; and in 1784, 418 polls.

Year.	Inhabitants.	Year.	Inhabitants.
1790 . . . . .	1,840	1855 . . . . .	2,745
1800 . . . . .	1,802	1860 . . . . .	3,193
1810 . . . . .	1,886	1865 . . . . .	3,176
1820 . . . . .	1,897	1870 . . . . .	3,584
1830 . . . . .	1,925	1875 . . . . .	1,908
1840 . . . . .	2,139	1880 . . . . .	1,862
1850 . . . . .	2,515	1885 . . . . .	1,987



